

GLIMPSES OF GOD.

Discourse of Dr. Talmage on the
Divine Saviour.

He Raises High Expectations of Day
When That Now But Dimly
Seen Will Be Fully
Revealed.

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In this discourse Dr. Talmage raises high expectations of the day when that which is now only dimly seen will be fully revealed; text, Job 26, 14: "Lo, these are parts of His ways. But how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

The least understood being in the universe is God. Blasphemous would be any attempt by painting or sculpture to represent Him. Egyptian hieroglyphs tried to suggest Him by putting the figure of an eye upon a sword, implying that God sees and rules, but how imperfect the suggestion! When we speak of Him, it is almost always in language figurative. He is "Light" or "Dayspring from on High," or He is a "High Tower" or the "Fountain of Living Waters." His splendor is so great that no man can see Him and live. When the group of great theologians assembled in Westminster abbey for the purpose of making a system of religious belief, they first of all wanted an answer to the question: "Who is God?" No one desired to undertake the answering of that overmastering question. They finally concluded to give the task to the youngest man in the assembly, who happened to be Rev. George Gillespie. He consented to undertake it on the condition that they would first unite with him in prayer for Divine direction. He began his prayer by saying: "O God, Thou art a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in Thy being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." That first sentence of Gillespie's prayer was unanimously adopted by the assembly as the best definition of God. But, after all, it was only a partial success, and after everything that language can do when put to the utmost strain and all we can see of God in the natural world and realize of God in the providential world we are forced to cry out with Job in my text: "Lo, these are parts of His ways. But how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

Archbishop Tillotson and Dr. Dick and Timothy Dwight and Jonathan Edwards of the past and the mightiest theologians of this young century have discoursed upon the power of God, the attribute of omnipotence. And we have all seen demonstrations of God's almightiness. It might have been far out at sea when in an equinoctial gale God showed what He could do with the waters. It might have been in an August thunderstorm in the mountains when God showed what He could do with the lightnings. It might have been in South America when God showed what He could do with the earthquakes. It might have been among the Alps when God showed what He could do with the avalanches. Our cheek was blanched, our breath stopped, our pulses fluttered, our whole being was terrorized, but we had seen only an instance of Divine strength. What was the power of that storm compared with the power which holds all the oceans? What was the power that shook the hills compared with the power that swings the earth through all the centuries and for 6,000 years and in a formative and incomplete shape for hundreds of thousands of years? What is that power that sustains our world compared with the power which rolls through immensity the entire solar system and all the constellations and galaxies and the universe? The mightiest intellect of man would give way if for a moment there came upon it the full appreciation of what omnipotence is.

We try to satisfy ourselves with saying: "It is natural law that controls things, gravitation is at work, centripetal and centrifugal forces respond to each other." But what is natural law? It is only God's way of doing things. At every point in the universe it is God's direct and continuous power that controls and harmonizes and sustains. That power withdrawn one instant would make the planetary system and all the worlds which astronomy reveals one universal wreck, bereft hemispheres, dismantled sunsets, dead constellations, debris of worlds. What power it must be that keeps the infernal fires of our world imprisoned—only here and there spurring from a Cotopaxi, or a Stromboli, or from a Vesuvius, putting Pompeii and Herculaneum into sepulcher, but for the most part the infernal fires chained in their cages of rock, and century after century unable to break the chain or burst open the door. What power to keep the component parts of the air in right proportion, so that all around the world the nations may breathe in health, the frosts and the heats hindered from working uni-

versal demolition! Power, as Isaiah says, "to take up the isles as a very little thing." Ceylon and Borneo and Hawaii as though they were pebbles; power to weigh the "mountains in scales" and the "hills in balances"—Tenerife and the Cordilleras. To move a rock we must have lever and screw and great machinery, but God moves the world with nothing but a word; power to create worlds and power to destroy them, as from the observatories again and again they have been seen red with flame, then pale with ashes and then scattered.

We get some little idea of the divine power when we see how it buries the proudest cities and nations. Ancient Memphis it has ground up until many of its ruins are no larger than your thumb nail and you can hardly find a souvenir large enough to remind you of your visit. The city of Tyre is under the sea which washes the shore, on which are only a few crumbling pillars left. Sodom and Gomorrah are covered by waters so deathful that not a fish can live in them. Babylon and Nineveh are so blotted out of existence that not one uninjured shaft of their ancient splendor remains. Nothing but Omnipotence could have put them down and put them under. The antediluvian world was able to send to the postdiluvian world only one ship with a very small passenger list. Omnipotence first rolled the seas over the land, and then told them to go back to their usual channels as rivers and lakes and oceans. At Omnipotent command the waters pouncing upon their prey, and at Omnipotent command sinking back into their appropriate places. By such rehearsal we try to arouse our appreciation of what Omnipotence is, and our reverence is excited, and our adoration is intensified, but after all we find ourselves at the foot of a mountain we cannot climb, hovering over a depth we cannot fathom, at the rim of a circumference we cannot compass, and we feel like first going down on our knees and then like falling flat upon our faces as we exclaim: "Lo, these are parts of His ways. But how little a portion is heard of Him? But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

So all those who have put together systems of theology have discoursed also about the wisdom of God. Think of a wisdom which can know the end from the beginning, that knows the thirtieth century as well as the first century. We can guess what will happen, but it is only a guess. Think of a mind that can hold all the past and all the present and all the future. We can contrive and invent on a small scale, but think of a wisdom that could contrive a universe! Think of a wisdom that can learn nothing new, a wisdom that nothing can surprise, all the facts, scenes and occurrences of all time to come as plainly before it as though they had already transpired! He could have built all the material universe into one world and swung it a glorious mass through immensity, but behold His wisdom in dividing up the grandeur into innumerable worlds, rolling splendors on all sides, diversity, amplitude, majesty, infinity! Worlds! Worlds! Moving in complete order, shining with complete radiance. Mightiest telescope on one hand and most powerful microscope on the other, discovering in the plan of God not one imperfection. What but Divine wisdom could have planned a human race and, before it started, built for it a world like this: pouring waters to slake human thirst and giving soils capacity to produce such food and lifting such a canopy of clouds embroidered with such sunlight and surrounding the world with such wonders that all the scientists of the ages have only begun to unroll them? Wisdom in magnitude and in atom, in archangel and in mollusk. Think of a wisdom that was able to form without any suggestion or any model to work by the eye, the ear, the hand, the foot, the vocal organs! No wonder that Galen, the most celebrated of medical authors among the ancients, fell on his knees at the overwhelming wisdom of God in the constitution of the human frame. Our libraries are filled with the wisdom of the great thinkers of all time. Have you considered the far superior wisdom which fashioned the brain for all those thoughts of the Infinite Mind that built those intellects? But it is only the millionth part of that wisdom that has come to mortal appreciation. Close next to every discovery is a wonder that has not been discovered. We see only one specimen among 10,000 specimens.

A tradition says that Abraham of the Old Testament was when an infant hidden in a cave because of the persecutions of Nimrod. The first time the child came out of the cavern it was night, and he looked up at the star and cried: "This is my God," but the star disappeared, and Abraham said: "No, that cannot be my God." After awhile the moon rose, and Abraham said: "This is my God," but it set, and Abraham was again disappointed. After awhile the sun rose, and he said: "Why, truly, here is my God," but the sun went down, and Abraham was saddened. Not until the God of the Bible appeared to Abraham was he satisfied, and his faith was so great that he was called "the Father of the Faithful." All

that the theologians know of God's wisdom is insignificant compared with the wisdom beyond human comprehension. The human race never has had and never will have enough brain or heart to measure the wisdom of God. I can think of only two authors who have expressed the exact facts. The one was Paul, who says: "Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out." The other author was the scientist who composed my text. I think He wrote it during a thunderstorm, for the chapter says much about the clouds and describes the tremor of the earth under the reverberations. Witty writers sometimes depreciate the thunder and say it is the lightning that strikes, but I am sure God thinks well of the thunder or He would not make so much of it, and all up and down the Bible He uses the thunder to give emphasis. It was the thunder that shook Sinai when the law was given. It was with thunder that the Lord discomfited the Philistines at Ebenezer. Job pictures the warhorse as having a neck clothed with thunder. St. John, in an apocalyptic vision, again and again heard the thunder. The thunder, which is now quite well explained by the electricians, was the overpowering mystery of the ancients, and standing among those mysteries Job exclaimed: "Lo, these are parts of His ways. But how little a portion is heard of Him?"

So, also, all systems of theology try to tell us what is omnipotence—that is, God's capacity to be everywhere at the same time. "Where is God?" said a heathen philosopher to a Christian man. The Christian answered: "Let me first ask you where He is not?" The child had it right when asked how many Gods are there and he answered: "One." "How do you know that?" he was asked again. He answered: "There is only room for one, for He fills earth and Heaven." An author says that if a man were set in the highest heavens he would not be any nearer the essence of God than if he were in the center of the earth. I believe it. If this Divine essence does not reach all places, what use in our prayer, for prayers are being offered to God on the other side of the earth as well as here, and God must be there and here to take supplications which are offered thousands of miles apart. Ubiquity! No one has it but God. And what an alarm to wickedness, an everywhere present Lord, and what a reinforcement when we need help! God on the throne and God with the kneeling child, saying its evening prayer at his mother's lap. God above you, God beneath you, God on the right of you, God on the left of you, God within you. No pantheism, for that teaches that all things are God, but Jehovah possesses all things, as our souls possess our bodies. God at the diameter and circumference of everything, as close to you as the food you put to your lips, as the coat you put upon your back, as the sunlight that shines in your face. Appreciation of that, if through Jesus Christ, the atoning Saviour, we are right with God, ought to give us a serenity, a tranquillity, that nothing could upset. Would it make us gloomy? No, for God is the God of joy and will augment our happiness. God in full possession of us is a thought out of which you ought to make anthems and entwine garlands and kindle illuminations.

So every system of theology has attempted to describe and define the Divine attribute of love. Easy enough is it to define fatherly love, motherly love, conjugal love, fraternal love, sisterly love and love of country, but the love of God defies all vocabulary. For many hundreds of years poets have tried to sing it, and painters have tried to sketch it, and ministers of the Gospel to preach it and martyrs in the fire and Christians on their deathbeds have extolled it, and we can tell what it is like, but no one has yet fully told what it is.

Only glimpses of God have we in this world, but what an hour it will be when we first see Him, and we will have no more fright than I feel when I now see you. It will not be with mortal eye that we will behold Him, but with the vision of a cleansed, forgiven and perfected spirit. Of all the quintillion ages of eternity to us the most thrilling hour will be the first hour when we meet Him as He is. This may account for something you have all seen and may not have understood. Have you not noticed that after death the old Christian looks young again or the features resume the look of 20 or 30 years before? The weariness is gone out of the face; there is something strikingly restful and placid; there is a pleased look where before there was a disturbed look. What has wrought the change? I think the dying Christian saw God. At the moment the soul left the body what the soul saw left its impression on the countenance. I think that is what gave that old Christian face after death the radiant and triumphant look. The bestormed spirit has reached the harbor; the hard battle of life is ended in victory. The body took that look the moment Heaven began, and the curtain was completely lifted and the glories of Jehovah's

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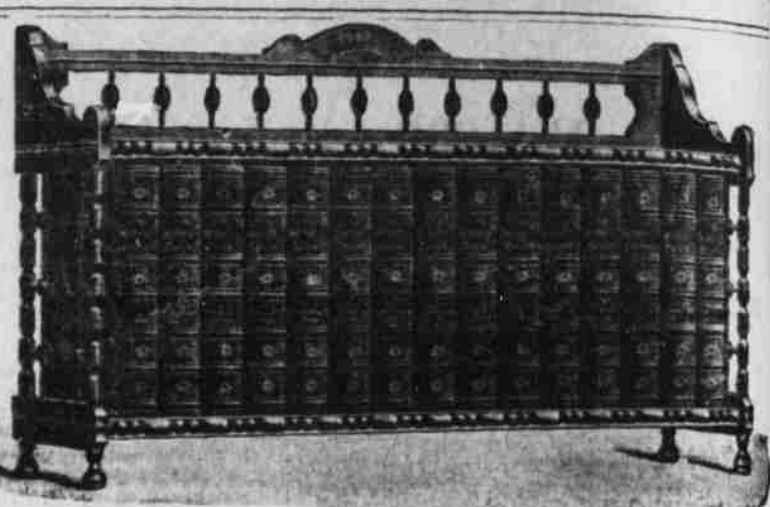
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DEPARTMENT.

presence rushed upon the soul. The departing spirit left on the old man's face a glad good-by, and that first look gave the pleased curve to the dying lips and smoothed out the wrinkles and touched all the lineaments with an indescribable radiance.

Last summer we journeyed thousands of miles to see the midnight sun from North Cape, Norway. We stood on deck in the arctic seas, our watches in our hands, and it was 11 o'clock at night, but light as an ordinary noonday. Then it was half past 11 o'clock at night, then it was 15 minutes of 12, but a long, wide, thick cloud hung over the sun. Are we to be disappointed as thousands have been and the journey here a failure? Ten minutes of 12, and the sun is still hidden. But about five minutes of 12 the cloud lifted, and the midnight sun, the most wondrous spectacle of all the earth, appeared, pouring forth a refulgence that turned the arctic sea into 20 miles of pearls and rubies and diamonds and emeralds and overpowering us with a glory that left us with body all a-tremble, and a mind full of all ecstasy, and a soul full of all worship. Thank God we saw it—the midnight sun. So with that departing Christian soul; the voyage of life has been long and rough and tempestuous; chilling sorrows have again and again snowed down upon him, and it is an arctic sea. Many clouds have filled the sky. It is approaching 12 o'clock, and the close of life's day. Friends stand around and count the parting moments. The clock strikes 12, and God breaks through the clouds and shines upon the features of the departing saint until they are transfigured with the glories of the Sun of Righteousness. That is what has so changed the features of the old man. It is the shining of the Midnight Sun.

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